

HOOKS AND NEW TUNES: CONTEMPORARY IRISH DANCE MUSIC IN ITS TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

By Andy Hillhouse

The Contemporary Context of Irish Traditional Music Performance

Irish dance music is a tradition of both centuries-old and recently composed tunes.¹ New tunes are being written and assimilated into the common-practice repertoire on a regular basis (Dowling 1999, p. 81; Jardine 1981). These are disseminated in several ways, including through oral transmission, commercial recordings of popular performers, publication of tune books and most recently through internet websites, on which musicians can post and display notation. Although the assimilation of tunes into common practice has been the subject of some debate in academia, there is little contemporary scholarly examination of the subject. Nonetheless, in part due to the recent growth in the global visibility of and markets for Irish and other "Celtic" musics, interest in the relation between tradition and innovation remains a persistent topic of ethnomusicological analysis. Scholars are examining tensions related to globalization, commodification, and transformations in Irish Traditional Music (ITM).² The purpose of this article is to offer an analytic strategy for examining the relationship between new tune composition and the increased globalization of ITM, through engaging with the notion of the 'hook' as an important aspect of tune composition. I borrow the term hook from popular music discourse to refer to melodic, rhythmic, and formal elements that stand out as distinguishing features of a tune. I argue not only that the hook is a contributing factor in the popularity of certain tunes, but also that examining hooks can lead to insights on the changing boundaries of ITM practice within the context of transnationalism.

¹ The terms "Irish traditional music" and "traditional dance music" are used throughout this article to connote the broad genre of Irish dance tunes, including recent compositions. The acronym used to identify this genre is ITM. Although "traditional" is a contested term, it is used here because it is in common use in Ireland, amongst musicians and non-musicians. The notion of "traditional" music is often differentiated from "folk" music, which tends to refer to the popular folk revival of the 1960s and its legacy among contemporary singer songwriters.

² See articles published in Philip V. Bohlman and Martin Stokes, *Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe*, (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003). This book is a collection of often articles by different authors commenting on musics that are associated with Celtic identity and globalization, including issues of authenticity, commercialization and hybridity.

This study takes into account the reception of tunes not only among specialists in ITM or among those with a high degree of symbolic capital as traditional musicians,³ but also among those within the broader social formation that Kathleen Lavengood has called a “transnational Celtic community of practice”. This term refers to a transnational social space centered around festivals, music camps, and schools in which traditional music practices from various regions and nations occur in exchange and interaction with one other (Lavengood 2008, pp 52–61). It is in this complex milieu that I first encountered ITM, through its transnational circulation in the 1980s, via sound recordings and concerts. Most of my initial exposure to the music came through transcultural folk festivals, in which Irish traditional music was programmed alongside other “Celtic” and “world” musics. In this pluralistic climate of choice I was drawn to ITM, yet found it difficult to connect with Irish musicians in my hometown of Vancouver, Canada. I learned what I could through travel, touring to festivals as part of a Celtic rock band in the 1990s, through occasional visits to Ireland, at local sessions in Vancouver and Toronto and, most recently, in lessons with the well-known fiddler Patrick Ourceau (since 2008).

I provide this brief autobiographical outline in order to establish my subject position in relation to ITM. My relationship with it is best thought of as a gradual process of discovery over the course of at least two decades. As a touring professional ‘backing’ guitarist, I have also performed with musicians of varied sensibilities and levels of experience with ITM, from connoisseurs and unambiguous insiders⁴ to those for whom Irish tunes are part of their stylistically diverse repertoire. What follows therefore includes a certain amount of recollection and some informal accounts from several decades of interaction with various segments of the ITM world, alongside more empirically based observations that draw on focused interviews and surveys.

The globalization of ITM is related to at least three important developments in the past few decades. Firstly, there is the transnational commodification of Irish expressive culture that reached new levels with the Broadway show *Riverdance* (Foley 1999, pp. 319-320), and the creation in the late 1980s and early 1990s of the marketing category known as “World Music”, with the subsection of “Celtic” (Vallely 2003, p. 209). ITM is now part of the

³ See Bourdieu 1990, pp 123–139 for a discussion of the concept of symbolic capital. Randal Johnson summarizes it as “degree of cumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)” (Bourdieu 1993, p. 7).

⁴ Two Irish musicians I have recently toured with are the piper Paddy Keenan and East Clare fiddler Maeve Donnelly.

financescape and *technoscape* of the World Music industry (Appadurai 1996, p. 31-33).⁵ Commercial recordings of Irish Music are promoted at the global level by cottage industries and corporate businesses. Since individual musicians potentially receive more money in publishing royalties from recording their own compositions than from traditional compositions, this motivates the creation of new tunes. As a result of this process, traditional notions of collectivity are challenged by the concept of private property. A notion of individual intellectual property rights is having an effect on the embedded cultural practice of treating tunes as common property that are "gifted" to fellow musicians. The private property concept is legally expressed in copyright law (McCann 2001, pp. 89-106). Hand-in-hand with the growth in the commercialization of traditional music, new technologies such as digital recording devices and the internet are changing the manner and speed of tune transmission, disseminating these newly composed tunes at a faster rate than ever before.

Secondly, the rapid economic growth that took place in Ireland in the early 1990s—"Celtic Tiger" (Kaul 2009, pp. 68–72; O'Toole 1997, p. 12)⁶ — gave Ireland a more visible cultural presence on the global stage, and at the same time fueled a debate in Irish music circles about outside cultural influences (Reiss 2003, pp. 152–158). A nation once on the periphery of Europe, Ireland experienced in that decade both an outward and an inward flow of culture that is characteristic of globalization (Hannerz 1989, pp. 66–75). Thus, new tune composition has been potentially open to greater non-Irish influence.

Finally, people of various ethnic and class backgrounds find affinity with ITM as it gains popularity in North America and the rest of the world. The practice becomes, to use Marc Slobin's term, "intercultural" (1992, pp. 42–49). As Irish music becomes less associated with nationalism and ethnic identity, it is more broadly accessible to the non-Irish, and thus is gaining global adherents. The context of ITM therefore is not strictly diasporic and homogeneous, but rather increasingly heterogeneous and transcultural. This raises questions about

⁵ The terms *ethnoscape*, *mediascape*, *technoscape*, *financescape* and *ideoscape* are proposed by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai as a framework to describe the "complexity of the current global economy". He writes, "The suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles". *Technoscapes* refer to the "global configuration of technology and the fact that technology, both mechanical and informational, moves at high speeds across various kinds of impervious boundaries". *Financescapes* refer to "currency markets, stock exchanges and commodity speculation".

⁶In the 1990s Ireland experienced an unprecedented economic boom, a benefit from membership in the EU, and also a result of an expanding high tech industry. O'Toole writes that the GDP per head in Ireland, once half that of the UK in the early 1970s, went to a ratio of 100.7 for Ireland to 98.9 for the UK in 1996.

changing taste, and potentially resultant changes in the structure of tunes.

As I am analyzing contemporary tunes that are now practiced transnationally, some highlighting of the characteristics of the body of musicians who practice ITM is necessary before commencing with tune analysis. Today, contextualizing ITM in order to analyze issues such as reception, commodification and assimilation is complex, since the music is now situated in a dispersed, global space. However, one can identify certain very general trends and contestations within what I outline here as a transnational ITM community (with some similarity to the vagueness with which members of social networking websites now use the term “community”).⁷ These trends are an influx of practitioners who practice ITM alongside other musics and the growth in events such as schools and festivals. The contestations are often related to these developments.

ITM, Bi-musicality, and Middle Class Practitioners

Due to the process of expansion of ITM beyond its original context in Ireland, its enthusiasts have come into contact since the 1960s not only with rock, but also with other diasporic popular musics. For some this has allowed for intercultural identification through those musics. Notions of a shared egalitarian ethos rooted in ancient, idealized and romanticized origins align for some the practice of ITM with other subaltern traditional musics (Monson 1999, p. 58; Taylor 1997, pp. 149–153). This, along with the growing ethnic diversity of those who practice ITM, leads to a related trend within the global ITM aggregate; there are an increasing number of practitioners who have facility with different musical styles, something akin to Mantle Hood’s bi-musicality (Hood 1960). For example, musicians who practice ITM may have western classical music training, or may be fluent in other styles as diverse as Southern Appalachian traditional music or jazz. In the professional realm, bi-musicality is useful to increase work opportunities, while at the social level it exemplifies the phenomenon of multiple affiliations and interculture (Slobin 1992, pp. 42–49). An example of a bi-musical (in fact tri-musical) player is a former bandmate of mine, Canadian musician Jeremiah McDade (b. 1976), who grew up playing fiddle and flute in Irish sessions in Edmonton, Canada, and made his first visit to the popular Willie

⁷ A more precise description of this extremely broad body of musicians is the aggregate of numerous loosely or non-affiliated, fluid gatherings of musicians who come together in informal social settings to play ITM.

Clancy Summer School of Irish Music, or Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, in Milltown Malbay, Clare, when he was fifteen, avidly learning repertoire and stylistic elements of ITM. McDade later studied jazz saxophone at McGill University in Montreal, all the while taking an active part in ITM sessions. He is also an avid student of the Indian *bansuri* flute. Another such bi-musical musician is Hanz Araki of Seattle. Araki, a sixth generation shakuhachi player and the son of Kinko Ryu Grand Master Kodo Araki and an Irish-American mother, is equally proficient on both the Irish wooden flute and the shakuhachi, and concurrently practices both traditions.

A further phenomenon is that of players who move fluently between styles related to ITM, such as Cape Breton fiddle music and Appalachian music. As a touring musician I have come to know of several players who are very insistent on fine aspects of style in all the traditions they practice, and are recognized for their skill in more than one community, demonstrating an impressive sophistication in multi-musical fluency. In a recent interview, jazz and bluegrass fiddler Matt Glaser notes an increase in this kind of multi-genre fluency among young musicians reared in North American fiddle camps.⁸ It must be noted, however, that bi-musicality and intercultural association are not altogether new in ITM. For example, the accordionist John Kimmel (1866-1942), the son of German immigrants living in New York, and celebrated by many Irish musicians as one of the most influential recorded accordionists in Irish music, was well known for his ragtime and German folk playing. He also played saxophone and cornet, popular instruments in the vaudeville context in which he performed. Nonetheless, the current proliferation and degree of such bi-musicality appears to distinguish the contemporary transnational ITM aggregate from its historical precedent.

For all perceived associations of ITM (and other traditional musics) with rural classes, working classes, and colonial disadvantage, the practitioners of ITM now include urban, middle class musicians who can afford to travel to schools, camps and workshops, a phenomenon that ITM shares with other traditional musics (Lavengood 2008, Hooker 2008, Laušević 2007). Those who are interested in learning about ITM after encountering it on recordings may attend

⁸ Glaser writes “There’s suddenly in America an awareness among young string musicians that they should be able to play classical music, jazz, country music, bluegrass, old time, Celtic, all at a very high level simultaneously. That’s like a paradigm shift in the thinking of these young kids. One sociological component probably accounts for this, these fiddle camps...where kids from all over get together and hear other kids do amazing things, and it just kind of stokes the fire.” Hubarts.com, “Berklee Launches New Americana Roots Program,” <http://www.hubarts.com/weblog/2009/12/berklee-kicks-off-new-american-roots-music-program.html> (accessed May 5, 2013).

such events to learn from consecrated masters. Some of these gatherings, such as the Willie Clancy Week in Milltown Malbay or the Catskills Irish Music Week in East Durham, New York, focus entirely on ITM. Others, such as British Columbia's Sunshine Coast School of Celtic Music, include ITM as part of a broader Celtic music focus. At schools such as this, musicians encounter a large variety of non-Irish traditional musics and there is the possibility for exchange amongst musicians from various backgrounds.

Transmission of ITM today therefore occurs in what Thomas Turino terms as participatory and presentational fields (Turino 2008). Whether at schools and festivals, or at Irish pubs in Helsinki, Toronto, or Tokyo, the main venue for amateur participation in ITM today is the session (see Fairbairn 1994 for an in-depth discussion of the session phenomenon). Not all players of ITM, however, would agree that session practice can be seen as any kind of best practice, or even representative practice, in the tradition. Therefore, the use of the session as a barometer of tune popularity is not an idea with which the musicians to whom I spoke all agreed. One musician spoke to me of the "tyranny of the session" (Gill 2005). For some, sessions are an environment in which the majority subsumes individual and local style. Sessions can be very large, and factors such as the number of rhythm players (*bodhran* frame drum and guitar in particular) and choice of tunes are points of controversy, pointing to the supremacy of melody in performance practice. Some musicians prefer smaller groups of like-minded musicians, or even prefer to play individually. Among these musicians, repertoire can be more select and idiosyncratic, and the very idea of certain tunes gaining widespread "hit-like" status is deeply troubling to them. Patrick Ourceau, for example, has told me on several occasions that he prefers an approach to learning tunes and settings based on his interest, even if many people do not know these. Nonetheless, it is a fact of Irish music practice today that the session is a pervasive performance context, and considerable exchange of knowledge is taking place within that environment (Hamilton 1999, p. 345).

The tensions of tradition and innovation are played out in a variety of environments within a diverse transnational community. The ethnoscape in which the exchange of new melodies takes place in any case is dispersed and heterogenous. This time of change in Irish expressive culture calls for a fresh look at tune assimilation and creativity in the practice of Irish music today. While the community of Irish musicians is expanding and negotiating this complex intersection of globalization, commercialization and individualism, is there a way to examine these changes affecting the structure of ITM, and in turn can

they tell us anything about how these tensions are negotiated? Is it possible to track changing taste and aesthetic judgment in traditional music through tune analysis?

New Tunes in ITM

After talking with traditional musicians in both Ireland and North America, both informally as a participant in sessions and during interviews, it is clear that the question of whether or not a tune can be classified as “common-practice repertoire” is – as the value of the session is – a controversial issue. Since I am focusing on tunes that have entered the repertoire in the last twenty-five years, it must be acknowledged that only time can tell the whether these tunes attain longstanding canonic status. Some older compositions have obtained such acceptance, particularly some composed by important figures of the 1930s through the 1950s. Some composers associated with the first generation of commercially recorded musicians include the fiddlers James Morrison, Ed Reavy, and Paddy Killoran. Two highly renowned composers from a more recent generation are East Galway fiddler Paddy Fahey and the late Tipperary accordionist Paddy O’Brien, both of who have created a significant body of tunes that are widely revered. Today, while new tunes may enter into common practice quite quickly following their circulation through recordings and various forms of exchange, the extent to which they will attain the level of reverence associated with these older tunes remains in question. As the young Galway piper Emmett Gill told me, “These new tunes haven’t been through the mill. They need to stand the test of time” (Gill 2005).

While the tunes I have chosen here as objects of study may not yet have “stood the test of time,” given this article’s focus on transnationalism I have selected them due to their broad popularity. Aside from the fact that I have found these tunes to be well known in my experience of playing in sessions in North America and Europe, two other methods of information gathering were used to determine the breadth of assimilation reached by these sample tunes. The first method was an online survey disseminated through the IRTrad listserv and www.thesession.org. While these websites are not universally appreciated among musicians, they nonetheless are one means of connecting and sharing opinions with a global group of practitioners of ITM. I also drew on communications and participant observation with other musicians, specifically from Galway, Vancouver, and Seattle. As I am commenting on the relationship between commodification and Irish music, I have chosen tunes that appear on a

number of commercially available recordings as well. The tunes are to some extent presented here in admittedly reified settings. I have transcribed them from either their most popular recordings or from recordings of their composers, reflecting the popularity of these versions.

ITM practitioners are listening to and learning from commercial recordings of Irish music promoted either by multinational record companies or successful independent labels. Although opinions on the usefulness of these resources vary, tunes are becoming widely accepted due to their inclusion in these sources. The representative tunes selected for this study were played in a wide number of communities, including in Japan, Sweden, Germany, and Canada, when I conducted this research in 2005. At that time, the tunes had been commonly played in these contexts for more than five years, showing a clear popularity.

The Hook

An article on composition in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (1999) states:

Communities of traditional musicians tend to vote collectively with their fingers. In a largely unspoken process of selection, a minority of tunes possessed of that special combination of *playability* and *aesthetic interest* gradually unfold themselves into the traditional repertoire, while the vast majority of new compositions languish in printed collections, on commercial CD's, or in the repertoire of isolated practitioners (my italics). (Dowling 1999, p. 82)

Dowling touches here on the two tensions that are at the heart of assimilation in oral transmission. "Playability" can refer not only to a tune's technical accessibility, but also to that which is easily familiar, to structural elements in the melody and rhythm that can be picked up quickly due to their recognizability as formulaic signifiers of Irish traditional music. These elements of continuity fall easily under the fingers of experienced instrumentalists. "Aesthetic interest" in new tunes comes from the seemingly unique elements that make a tune stand out from the vast numbers of similar sounding melodies. These elements represent innovation. As Vancouver musician Dave Marshall told me, "there has to be some kind of a 'hook' for the tune to catch on" (interview, February 2005). Referring to another tradition, the Newfoundland fiddler and composer Emile Benoit has likewise acknowledged the importance of such a unique "catch" (Quigley 1995, p. 66).

As the object of tune structure study has been either the identification of archetypal tunes (Bronson 1950), the creation of tune "family trees" for archival use (Shapiro 1975), or the understanding of how formulaic material is used in traditional composition (Bayard 1950, Cowdery 1990, O'Suilleabhain 1990), previous research on traditional tunes has focused on the shared, rather than the distinctive, characteristics of tunes. However, distinction is important to a tune's longevity; with many tunes being composed and few making it into the common practice repertoire, tunes must contend for attention in the sonic marketplace. In order for new compositions to stand out from the large body of tunes created in the form and structure of ITM, they must contain a unique element that is quickly recognizable and distinctive. In the analysis offered here, I argue that that element is the hook.

The idea of the hook, used in popular music industries for some time, has received relatively little attention by scholars. Although the origin of the term still needs research, popular music studies offer some definitions of the concept of the hook. Gary Burns writes:

The word *hook* connotes being caught or trapped, as when a fish is hooked, and also addiction, as when one is hooked on a drug (Burns 1987:1).

The *Songwriter's Market*, a music industry journal, defines a hook as "a memorable *catch* phrase or melody line that is repeated in a song" (Kuroff 1982: 397). Monaco and Riordan offer a definition that excludes the necessity for repetition: "a musical or lyrical phrase that stands out and is easily remembered" (Monaco and Riordan 1980: 178). A cognate exists in western classical music theory in Caplin's 'basic idea', the unit of form that is "small enough to group with other ideas into phrases and themes but large enough to be broken down (fragmented) in order to develop its constituent motives (Caplin 1998:37)." The similarity of this notion to the pop music hook lies in Caplin's description of the melodic content of the basic idea, which he calls *characteristic* melody, in contrast with *conventional* melody:

A characteristic melody uniquely defines a theme as individual, one different from other themes. A conventional melody, on the contrary, is interchangeable from piece to piece. (Ibid.)

This contrast between interchangeable and unique material has been identified in other musics. Don Traut sees an alignment between Keil's concept

of the 'significant gesture' in jazz, which interrupts the continuous 'vital drive', and the hook in pop music (Keil 1994, p. 72, referenced in Traut 2005, p. 58). To Keil, the vital drive is the repetitive element in the music, such as the underlying repetition of a riff that holds the listener's attention until the delivery of an impactful gesture. In both Traut's and Keil's analyses, how hooks and significant gestures both achieve their impact is largely determined by their context. There are no consistent properties that can be identified as hook-like in any music; melodic content that may serve as a hook in one instance can be standard material in another. This subjective aspect of hooks makes it difficult to identify them in an empirical manner (and I suppose provides one reason as to why writing a "hit" is such an elusive pursuit for aspiring songwriters!). As Traut points out in his analysis of 1980s pop songs, "in one song, a particular pattern may serve as a clear contrast to the rest of the song, creating a distinct hook. But in other cases, this distinction is not so clear. Rhythmic patterns, despite being repeated throughout entire songs in some cases, can form strong hooks when they contain rhythmically interesting syncopation patterns, or when they are combined with recurring pitch patterns" (Traut 2005, p. 58). According to this analysis, repetition itself can create a recognizable gesture, in contrast to Keil's emphasis on the distinction between the character of the riff and the hook. Indeed, a high degree of motivic repetition can become part of the distinctiveness of the tune, a point further reinforced by my analysis of *The Torn Jacket* below. The hook is defined relationally to other aspects of the tune, rather than through any universal "hook-like" qualities.

While it is notable that theorists of different genres have identified the importance of contrast between conventional and unique elements in defining hooks and related notions of uniqueness in tunes, the contexts of classical composition, jazz and popular music of course are very different. Overall formal structure and the extent to which smaller melodic units are developed over the larger form determine the function of the hook, and these factors are often genre specific. In 18th century classical music, the distinctive basic idea is used as the nucleus of larger-scale melodic development; in jazz, identifiable melodic fragments are spun out in improvisation to develop a solo. By contrast, in the small sixteen-measure form of many ITM tunes, melodic development in the same sense does not occur, and other factors such as melodic contour and interrelation of melody and rhythm take on high importance. Irish melodies, which are repeated a number of times with ornamentations and variations, in a sense have more in common with popular songs, in that they have a small amount of time in which to capture the listener.

Gary Burns, in attempting to create a typology for pop music hooks, breaks songs into elements that can be analyzed (Burns 1987, 2–3).⁸ While many of the elements he identifies are not applicable to Irish instrumental dance music, such as those that relate to *riffs* or electronically generated sounds created in the studio, his distinction between melodic hooks and rhythmic hooks, in particular, are relevant to ITM. The definition of hook used by Burns is similar to that offered by Monaco and Riordan: an element of the tune that is easily remembered. It is important to note that this definition does not include the idea of “catchiness”, that is, the noticeability of particular aspects of melody and how they stand out. Colin Quigley recalls how Emile Benoit highlighted this aspect as important (email communication, May 2013).

When I asked composer, flute player, and flute maker Samuel “Hammy” Hamilton about his tunes *Kerfunken* and *The Woodcock*, and about his compositional process, he stated:

You know that every Irish tune can be pointed out as being like some other one, but apart from that I normally base tunes around what pop composers would call a “hook” ...i.e. a sequence of notes, (or intervals actually, I tend to think in intervals) which catches my fancy. I've several times tried to make a tune out of a song, or a nontrad piece of melody...but so far without success. But what attracts me to those things in the first place is the potential “hook” (Hamilton: email communication, March 2005).

While Hamilton uses the term hook in the description of his compositional process (perhaps indicative of his formal music education) it is not widespread in ITM. I am not aware of a longstanding, cognate term that can be considered emic within ITM. This fact raises the question as to whether the importance of the “catchy” aspects of tunes is increasing in the age of the commodification of traditional culture. If so, hook is an appropriate term in relation to the study of new tunes in contemporaneity, as they are subject both to so-called traditional processes of free exchange and popular music style commodification. While new tunes may not always start out as commodities, they eventually become so when recorded by well-known performers, with the royalties going to the composer (if

⁸ Burns' typology divides hooks into textual and non-textual elements. Textual elements include the musical elements of rhythm, melody and harmony, and the “non-musical” element of lyrics. Non-textual elements include the performance elements of instrumentation, tempo, dynamics and improvisation, and the production elements of sound effects, editing, mix, channel balance and signal distortion.

they are registered with a performing rights organization) (McCann 2001). Such is the case with the reel *The Roaring Barmaid* (Fig. 5), a very popular newly composed tune recorded by several well-known performers. The English banjo player Tony Sullivan, who composed *The Roaring Barmaid*, says:

The Roaring Barmaid was composed so long ago that I have forgotten the occasion of its composition. This tune was going around long before Lunasa played it. The Comhaltas children played it around 20 years before. But of course, after Michael McGoldrick and Lunasa recorded it, it became much more widely known (Sullivan 2005).¹¹

As can be seen with *The Roaring Barmaid*, recent compositions can live a dual life as both commercially marketed and freely received cultural objects. Before *The Roaring Barmaid* existed on commercial recordings, it was already in free exchange in oral tradition. The success of recordings only increased its popularity. The use of hooks exemplifies the dual nature of newly composed tunes in the Irish dance music tradition as both popular and folk music, subject to both folk and commercial processes.

¹¹ Michael McGoldrick is a very well known virtuoso flute player and uilleann piper from Manchester. He is known for being involved in fusion projects as well as being well respected for his traditional playing. He was a founder of *Lunasa*, the fusion band *Flook* and recorded the CD *Fused*, which consists largely of traditional tunes accompanied by funk and dance grooves, in 2002.

The Torn Jacket

Fig. 1: *The Torn Jacket*

The West Cork fiddler Connie O'Connell composed *The Torn Jacket* (Fig. 1) in the 1980s. A range of well-known performers, including Seamus Tansey, Jackie Daly and Seamus Cray, Liz Carroll, Kevin Crawford, and O'Connell himself have recorded it. This tune contains two distinctive melodic characteristics that can be classified as "hooks". The first is achieved through simple repetition. The phrase structure of section A is based on a repeating pattern, in which motif *a* is stated and repeated twice (usually varied in performance), every eight quarter-note beats. This motif contains a rhythmic figure (♩ . ♩ ♩) beginning on beat one, in which the dotted quarter gives the downbeat a strong emphasis. This regular repetition of melodic and rhythmic material can be thought of as a hook in the sense that such repetition of a motif reinforces its importance, or its distinctiveness from the surrounding melodic material. This type of hook points to how one aspect of distinctiveness is the particular pattern of motivic repetition within a tune. With *The Torn Jacket*, the very regularity of the repetition stands out as a distinctive characteristic.

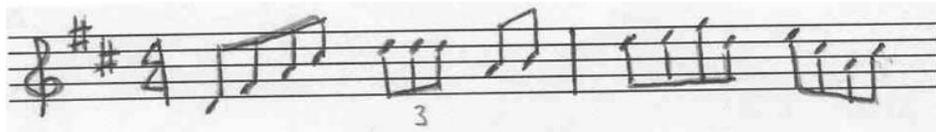
The second hook is achieved through an unusual use of melodic range within a phrase. The B section begins with an ascending motivic shape, which is a common way to begin either section of a dance tune. Again, the first measure, motif a², outlines a d major arpeggio starting on f^{#1}. In this instance, it is an ascending eighth-note arpeggio up to the range of a tenth, ending on a quarter note a². This ascending four-note shape is employed in a number of tunes, and has the effect of giving impetus to the melody. In *The Torn Jacket*, the range of a tenth gives the arpeggio an extra sense of momentum towards the higher octave. Normally, this shape as an opening figure in Irish dance music is contained in a smaller range. Below is the figure from section B of *The Torn Jacket*, followed by examples from either sections A or B of some older tunes transcribed by Francis O'Neill:

Fig. 2: Ascending Arpeggiated Opening Motifs

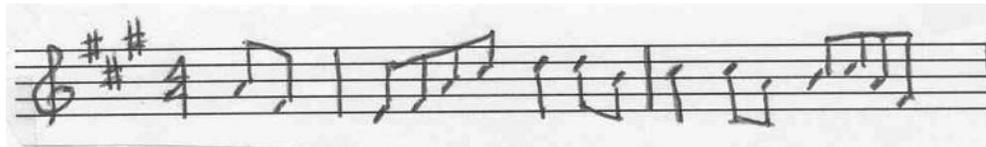
a) *The Torn Jacket*



b) *Don't Bother Me* (O'Neill 1903: 122)



c) *The Rose in the Garden* (O'Neill 1903: 116)



In the above examples, the ascending arpeggiated motif in the traditional tunes does not extend beyond an octave. Indeed, in my perusal of the O'Neill and Breathnach volumes I found no tunes with a similar figure that that arpeggiates more than an octave. The composer of *The Torn Jacket* draws upon a previously established and common melodic shape in Irish music, but by expanding the range, surprises the listener by altering the traditional melodic pattern.

Beare Island

Fig. 3: *Beare Island*

Finbar O'Dwyer, a button accordion player, composed the reel *Beare Island* (Fig. 3) in the early 1980s, and this tune is especially idiomatic for the accordion. The modern Irish button accordion utilizes two rows of buttons. One row is a diatonic scale in B major and the other a C major scale (or less frequently one row in C and the other in C#). This allows access to the full chromatic scale. *Beare Island* displays this quasi-chromaticism through the means of mixed modality. The tune starts with an arpeggiated E major chord in the first measure, leading to a d² on the first beat of the second measure, giving the first two measures a mixolydian modality. In the fourth measure, the melody contains a g natural, and for the remainder of the tune there is an E dorian modality, more common in ITM.

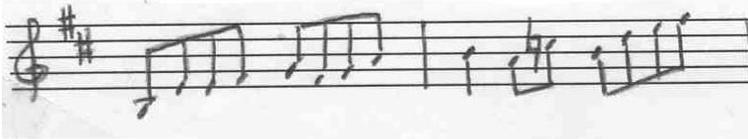
In *Beare Island*, an identifiable, memorable hook is this fluidity of the third degree, due simply to the surprise that occurs for the listener in the shifting

modality. However, this is not to suggest that such fluidity is novel in ITM. Indeed, two of the most popular twentieth century composers in Irish music, Ed Reavy and Paddy Fahey, are known for the modal ambiguity in their compositions (Meade 2002). Further, as my fiddle teacher Patrick Ourceau—a respected fiddler in ITM circles who is heavily influenced by East Clare and East Galway music—has often demonstrated to me in lessons, settings of tunes by numerous fiddlers often included ambiguous thirds and other notes of the scale. In such cases, modal variation is part of the performers creative toolkit for personal expression and variation. Thus, the hook of shifting modality is an element of continuity within ITM, rather than a break from it.

With respect to motivic structure, *Beare Island* also demonstrates continuity, as it consists of common motifs and phrases that can be found in numerous other tunes. The following melodic motif *c* is here shown with examples from Breathnach's collection of a few other tunes with similar motivic contour:

Fig. 4: Motif from *Beare Island* and Related Contours

a) *Beare Island* Motif *c*



b) Excerpt from *Gan Ainm* (Breathnach 1963b: 116)



c) Excerpt from *Johnstown Reel* (Breathnach 1963a: 63)



What is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of *Beare Island* is the lack of motivic repetition; there is only one repeating motive, motive *c*, which is stated and repeated twice in slight variation and octave transposition in section B

(motifs *e* and *e1*). The lack of phrase or motivic repetition in the first section of the tune allows for a broad, undulating melodic contour. In this sense, *Beare Island* has a "song-like" quality to its melodic shape.

As repetition of melody fragments or part of sections is very common in Irish dance music, tunes that are melodically through-composed stand out from the larger body of tunes. This is another hook in *Beare Island*. Whereas *The Torn Jacket* is distinctive due to its consistent repetition, *Beare Island* stands out for the opposite reason.

In terms of melodic contour, *Beare Island* does not clearly demonstrate complete confluence with any other tune family. Motifs, rather than whole sections, show relationships with other tunes. In this sense, *Beare Island* is an example of Cowdery's principle of "recombination" of familiar and newly composed motifs, rather than the overall "outlining" of an entire melodic "family" (Cowdery 1990).

The Roaring Barmaid

Fig. 5: *The Roaring Barmaid*

The musical score for 'The Roaring Barmaid' is presented in four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The first staff begins with a boxed 'A' and contains motifs 'a' and 'b'. The second staff contains motifs 'a' and 'c'. The third staff is marked with a boxed 'B' and contains motifs 'd' and 'd¹'. The fourth staff contains motifs 'e¹' and 'd²'. Chord symbols G: I, I, vi, and I are placed below the staves.

Banjo player Tony Sullivan's tune *The Roaring Barmaid* (Fig. 5), also known as *The Butlers of Glen Ave.* after being mistitled on a Lunasa recording, recombines smaller familiar motives with new motivic material. The opening motif of the A section of *The Roaring Barmaid* shows similarities with the opening

motif of a tune family related to *Off to California*, a well-known hornpipe:

Fig. 6: Opening Phrase of *The Roaring Barmaid* and Related Tunes

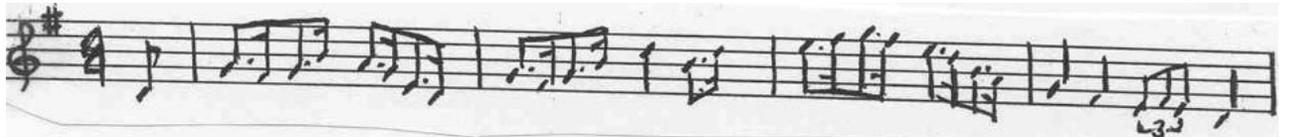
a) *The Roaring Barmaid*



b) *Off to California* (O'Neill 1903: 180)



c) *Sweet Flowers of Milltown*¹⁴



d) *Dr. Taylor* (O'Neill 1903: 125)



The B section of *The Roaring Barmaid* contains an atypical phrase structure. In this respect, *The Roaring Barmaid* is a clear example of a tune that contrasts a section evocative of continuity (section A) and with one that suggests innovation (section B). The four-note ascending fragment $d^2-e^2-g^2-b^2$, first appearing in motif *b* in a lower octave, appears three more times in the upper octave. Its placement in section B is particularly unusual. This fragment opens section B as motif *d*, and repeats in motif *d1*, which is an elongation of motif *d*. The second repeat, immediately following motif *d1*, is a literal restatement of motif *d*. Grouping the three consecutive motifs *d-d1-d* according to number of beats (with the beat on

¹⁴ This example is taken from a recording of flute player Tom Morisson.

the dotted quarter note), the phrases are grouped into three, four and three beats consecutively, resulting in an asymmetrical motivic structure. This unusual structure is a strong hook.

Furthermore, the dotted eighth note, pitch b^2 , is emphasized. This is due to both its length, which contrasts to the surrounding continuous eighth notes, and the ascending eighth note figure that precedes it, characterizing b^2 as a stressed pitch. The pitch b^2 first appears in motif *d* as beat two of the measure, while its next two consecutive appearances are on beat one.

The composer is playing with the expected "natural phrasing" of the Irish reel, the internalized sense of phrasing among ITM practitioners as described by O'Suilleabhain (1990, 120), in order to create a hook. This example represents how some hooks can be based on the reversal of expectation of traditional tune structure.

Another noticeable characteristic of *The Roaring Barmaid* is that it is essentially a pentatonic tune. There is no fourth degree (c) in the mode, and there is only one appearance of an $f\#$, as a passing tone in motif *e1*. Although there are some very well known pentatonic tunes in the common-practice repertoire, they are infrequent (Breathnach 1977, p. 12).

Questions for Future Research

Although I only focus on a few examples, in this article I specifically argue that the relationship between relatively formulaic elements and what I call hooks can be examined to explore sociocultural questions related to globalization. My initial foray into this approach here raises certain questions about connections that can be drawn between the changing structure of tunes and the changing community of musicians that plays them.

An important question is related to structural continuity. Are new tunes getting more "catchy", and therefore changing structurally? The three popular new compositions included here suggest that, while uniqueness is achieved through the manipulation of the players' or listeners' expectations of traditional formulae, this reversal of expectation is sometimes based on rhythmic, melodic, and structural aspects that are apparent in older music. Certain distinctive and memorable features, such as extensive repetition (or inversely, the lack thereof, as seen in *Beare Island*) can be thought of as actually demonstrating continuity. By playing with the inner rules of traditional tune structure, changes – some subtle and some more pronounced – can be made that stay within broadly accepted boundaries of ITM, yet at the same time push those boundaries. Such tunes may

appeal to those with deeper knowledge of older music, as well as to newcomers. In this way, hooks can indicate the negotiation between those in the broader ITM community who value elements thought of as traditional, and those who have tastes for more contemporary sounds.

Other tunes demonstrate “catchiness” at a more surface level, such as the asymmetry in *The Roaring Barmaid*. In this tune, while the overall meter remains in the standard duple time of reels, the meter is ambiguous due to the shifting accents. This aspect suggests confluence with a number of other traditional musics, from the so-called crooked tunes of Appalachian and Quebecois music to Eastern European music. Are cosmopolitan musical tastes and bi-musical performers more open to such innovations than earlier practitioners and audiences? With these questions in mind, I contend that a thorough examination of transformations in ITM could include a focus on hooks within a broad range of compositions to reach more substantial conclusions.

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